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Trends in Adult and Continuing Education in Germany

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This contribution summarizes the most important trends in adult education in Germany as they were elaborated in a secondary analytic research project of the DIE (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung - German Institute for Adult Education) in 2007. According to the study, participation in continuing education in Germany is increasing after long years of decrease, even though, overall, financing of adult education has been further reduced. Cooperation as well as competition between continuing education institutions has increased. Course offers have become shorter, counselling and information have more significant roles than in the past, and those employed in adult education, especially teaching staff, have a higher level of qualifications than before. Adult education policy in Germany has varying aims as a result of the federal structure of the country. Incentives for vocational and workplace training predominate however.

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Trends in Adult and Continuing Education in Germany

This contribution summarizes the most important trends in adult education in Germany as they were elaborated in a secondary analytic research project of the DIE (Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung – German Institute for Adult Education) in 2007. According to the study, participation in continuing education in Germany is increasing after long years of decrease, even though, overall, financing of adult education has been further reduced. Cooperation as well as competition between continuing education institutions has increased. Course offers have become shorter, counselling and information have more significant roles than in the past, and those employed in adult education, especially teaching staff, have a higher level of qualifications than before. Adult education policy in Germany has varying aims as a result of the federal structure of the country. Incentives for vocational and workplace training predominate however.

1. Basic information

Comparing continuing education in Germany with other countries in Europe, one immediately notices a difference in how continuing education is defined. Adult and continuing education in Germany is defined more narrowly as “education following completion of initial professional or vocational educational training”. Trainees or university students who, for instance, have not acquired a professional or vocational degree (regardless of their age) are not considered to be participants in continuing education.

Another important aspect is that the sixteen *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany have sovereign power over the system of education (with the exception of certain aspects of vocational training) while, within the individual *Länder*, there are extremely different ways of organizing the educational system. On top of this, a wide range of ministries is involved with continuing education at the Federal and *Länder* levels, such as the ministries of education, labour, the interior, etc. Finally, the German situation is marked by a high degree of institutionalization of continuing education in comparison to other European countries, but it is also embedded in extraordinarily complex and multifarious plural structures, which means that there are not only horizontal differences between the *Länder*, but also vertical differences between different organizational areas.

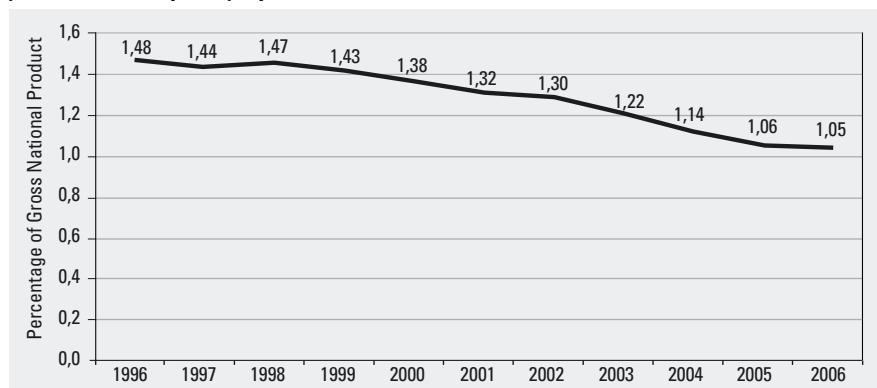
This becomes most evident when one examines general and vocational continuing education separately. In the area of general continuing education, adult education colleges and private institutes predominate, whereas in the area of vocational continuing education, it is business enterprises, economic chambers, together with private institutes once again, which are preponderant.

In view of the differentiated situation characterizing continuing education in Germany, it is difficult to identify general trends, as some of the *Länder* are pulling out of institutional promotion of continuing education, while others are investing considerable resources here. Nevertheless, some general trends can be identified and data produced bearing these out.

2. Decline in funding

Over the last ten years the amount of funding devoted to continuing education in Germany has declined in absolute and relative terms. Thus, for example, expenditures in this area were EUR 27.8 billion in 1996, but only EUR 24.1 billion in 2006. Funding has also decreased as a percentage of Gross National Product. In 1996 it accounted for 1.48 percent of GNP, whereas in 2006 this figure was only 1.05 percent.

Decrease in Public (by federal, *Länder* and local governments, and public agencies) and private (individual and corporate) expenditures



A significant part of this decline is also accounted for by the decrease in public funding. Thus the state (Federal, *Länder* and local governments) provided each person taking part in continuing education in 1996 a sum of EUR 23.68, but in 2006 this figure was only EUR 20.30. The same trend is also reflected in another statistic: EUR 1.86 per person was contributed in government funding in 1996, while in 2006 this amount was only EUR 1.60.

The decrease in the volume of funding for continuing education over the past ten years provides food for thought. It stands in stark contrast to the growing importance of continuing education acknowledged by actors responsible for educational policy. It appears, however, that the policy thrust is moving in a different direction; for

instance, public funding in the area of pre-school education has increased over this period.

3. More cooperation and competition

Interestingly enough, both cooperation and willingness to cooperate in the field of continuing education as well as competition have grown over the past ten years.

Continuing education institutions can more and more frequently be heard to claim that they work together with other educational institutions, but also with business enterprises, cultural institutions and government institutions in devising their programmes in order to reach target groups and provide information and counselling. Continuing education institutions are explicitly voicing a desire for even more cooperation, in particular with respect to regional cooperation. The impact of a major national programme known as “Learning Regions”, in which cooperative procedures can be instituted and assessed on a trial basis, can be perceived in many cases.

At the same time, competition is growing among the approximately 19,000 continuing education institutions in Germany. The number of providers has grown, while institutions are increasingly seeking to create profiles focusing on individual segments and niches, but also on broadly ranged programmes (such as, for instance, those at adult education colleges, just as in the past). Globalization is having an impact on individual sectors; hence language programmes are gaining increasing currency in an international market. Programmes in the areas of health, management and economics are subject to increasing international competition.

In addition, there are growing financial constraints. These emanate to some extent from the decline in state promotion of institutions, but also from the growing quality and service demands of learners (the “customers”). Due to this, combined with a frequently tested “threshold” of the maximum fees which can be charged for certain programmes and certain target groups (that is to say, the maximum amounts which people interested in taking part in a programme are willing and able to pay), the latitude of action for institutions is shrinking.

4. Modules of shorter duration

In analyzing the trend in programmes and courses on offer, it is evident that the duration of these programmes and courses is growing shorter. This is especially the case with traditionally long-term programmes such as vocational training and languages. These are increasingly being carried out in short units – for instance on weekends – and with greater intensity. Programmes and courses tailored to meet the specific needs of entire groups, such as employees of individual enterprises, have grown considerably in

number. Here, courses and programmes are developed and carried out “on demand”. In these cases the continuing education facility also acts as a service provider specialized in education meeting a specified demand.

This is also associated with the development of modules. Progressive programme segments which have been developed in modular form and which award certificates upon completion, entitling but not obliging the holder to take part in additional modules, are becoming more and more common. The structure of programmes thus increasingly allows learners to pursue their specific interests by selecting appropriate modules and acquiring individual learning and educational profiles.

5. Counselling and information

This is linked to a greater need for information and counselling. The possibility of individual combination of single modules induces awareness of their availability and evaluation of their respective quality, the possibility of access and the work involved. Information on these is necessary as is targeted “educational counselling” which supports the selection of and decision to take part in programmes and courses.

Such information and counselling systems seem to be increasing in number. In many cases they are part of the respective educational facilities (when these are large), but there are also strategies, information and counselling on joint cooperative structures within a region. The individual interests of educational facilities frequently place constraints on the development of joint structures, but in some cases these have been developed and put into practice in an effective manner.

6. Employment

Over the past ten years the number of full-time employed persons has not increased in continuing education in Germany. It has even declined slightly which reflects the trend in funding of the area. The number of employees in related professions, voluntary staff and the number of free-lancers who work on their own account as “sole proprietors” has, on the other hand, increased. The problems resulting from this development are obvious. Standards for continuing education and qualification are all the more difficult to adhere to when the individuals involved are not provided with adequate job security.

This decline does not apply to qualifications which employees have when they begin working in continuing education, however. Here, it can be seen that compared to previous years more and more individuals can demonstrate qualifications in adult education (by having completed study courses or obtained additional qualifications) and hence that qualifications among teachers have, on the whole, improved. There is

still little information on the question of how the switchover of education at universities to a consecutive BA/MA system will change the situation of those working in the area of further education and their structure.

7. Amount of participation and structures

Following a decline at the turn of the century, participation in continuing education is on the rise again. The most recent figures from the Reporting System on Continuing Education as well as the Adult Education Survey for Germany show a slightly increased rate of approximately 43 percent at present. However, the level at the beginning of the 1990s – 48 percent – has still not been attained again.

In the analysis of participation structures, it can clearly be seen that there is still a gap between the social status and the qualification level of the participants in Germany, and that this gap may even be growing. Continuing education in Germany is still, and perhaps now even more so, an instrument with which those who are better educated with a higher social status have greater advantages over those who are less well educated with a lower social status. The probability of taking part in continuing education is at any rate significantly higher for this group than for those disadvantaged in education. So there is a perceivable gap which, if it widens, will mean that continuing education is not reaching out to include population groups, but rather strengthening their exclusion. It is also interesting that the difference between the genders in terms of participation is almost the same. Roughly equal percentages of men and women take part in continuing education with equal frequency today. The differences are merely in the content of the programmes and courses which are attended. While men focus on a narrow band of professional educational training programmes, women participate intensively in the entire spectrum of continuing education, especially in the language and health area.

Interesting developments can also be observed in terms of age. The participation of older groups in continuing education is increasing at a disproportional rate, including in age groups which are already in retirement (65 and over). Here there are also no doubt problems bringing appropriate programmes, access routes and strategies closely in line with the needs of these groups.

8. Educational policy goals

The Federal and *Länder* governments in Germany are pursuing the development of continuing education and in some cases developing programmes with the aim of improving certain sectors and aspects of these. The Federal government, for example, has initiated a better programme for basic education, while in many *Länder* special programmes are being sponsored, on, for instance, rural adult education, professional

educational training for young adults, the qualification of employees working in the area of continuing education, etc.

Continuing education policy in Germany is also increasingly being based on the benchmarking criteria of the European Union, which set out a relatively high participation target for continuing education for the year 2010 (Lisbon goals). However, there appears to be no coherent programme for the development of continuing education in Germany, no general strategies and no increased commitment on the part of the state. This may be due to the fragmentation of the German educational environment due to the control of the sixteen *Länder*, but it is no doubt also related to the specificity of German development and definition of continuing education.

References and data corresponding to the discussion herein can be found in summarized form in the recently published book "Trends der Weiterbildung" (2008).

Sources

Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung (Ed.) (2008): Trends der Weiterbildung. DIE-Trendanalyse 2008. Bielefeld